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The Divinity School News

The Divinity School of the University of Chicago

Vol. XVIII AUGUST 1, 1951 No. 3

Published quarterly by the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, 5801 Ellis Ave., February 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1. Entered as second-class matter, March 29, 1934, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of August 24, 1912. Acceptance for mailing at special rate of postage provided for in Section 1103, Act of February 28, 1925, authorized April 18, 1934.

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND ANXIETY

Anxiety has become a key word in our attempts to understand the present predicament of ourselves and our world. Not only are the direct discourse studies like psychology, philosophy, and theology talking of anxiety. The arts are doing it, too, and increasingly. W. H. Auden's now famous poem is entitled "The Age of Anxiety." Anxiety is also appearing in music, and literature is full of it. Indeed, each of us individually thinks more of anxiety than we did a few years back. The vague forebodings and cloudy dreads we have about our world of Russia, atomic bombs, and hysterical reactions to our emerging democratic institutions seem also reflected in our personal lives—and we tend to say, "My anxiety."

There is no doubt that these feelings bear some relationship to anxiety. But they are anxiety in solution, anxiety in alloy, anxiety with admixtures of something else—and not anxiety itself. Our concern with anxiety, as Christians, must be with the relation of it to the Christian faith. But here, as so often in Christian experience, we find that we cannot solve our vaguely sensed problem by proceeding directly and painlessly to an answer. We find, instead, that a better understanding of our problem makes necessary and possible a different kind of answer. As Luther had to give up struggling with a legalistic conscience and redefine the problem of isolation from God before he could find the meaning of faith, so we, to permit the Christian faith to resolve our anxiety, must redefine the nature of the problem of anxiety.

Anxiety itself, it seems to me, is always the same thing. This is nowhere better expressed than in the words of Freud. He wrote: "Anxiety sounds the alarm . . . in order to avoid the danger situation." Anxiety, in other words, is the alarm signal that attempts to tell us something is wrong. What our reaction to the alarm signal will be is determined not by the anxiety itself but by something else. We may face it or, in one form or another, attempt to evade it.

In the Old Testament lesson for today there were two excerpts, one a portion of the story of Joseph in which Joseph's brothers, returning from Egypt

with their grain, find the money in the mouth of the sack and are afraid (Gen. 42:25–28). In the other passage, from the story of Moses, we see Moses turning aside to see the burning bush; but, when he knows that it is the Lord who speaks to him, he becomes afraid (Exod. 3:1–6).

Both these stories show us what anxiety means—but they also reveal how widely different in meaning are our possible responses to the alarm signal of anxiety. In the case of Joseph's brothers, they have been driven to Egypt by the famine in Canaan, have seen though not recognized Joseph, have purchased grain and paid for it, have had their lives spared on condition that they return home and bring back their youngest brother Benjamin. Knowing as they do that the loss of Benjamin may kill their father, they ought to be very much afraid. But the story does not indicate this. Their lives have been saved; they have the grain; and, if they are still uncertain what shall be done about Benjamin, it is not enough to prevent them from sleeping. Yet, when they find money in the mouth of one of the sacks, then they become anxious indeed. This cannot be according to either Pharaoh or Hoyle. It is the unknown, and they recognize it as an alarm signal. Is it really fearsome in fact? They do not stop to ask. It is the inexplicable, they believe, and so they fear it knowing not what it means. They do not return to Joseph to find out but continue homeward with an anxious feeling about the money which they had not had about Benjamin.

Contrast this with Moses and the bush. Moses saw the bush flaming but without being consumed. Here was the unknown for sure, but he turned courageously aside to investigate it. Then God spoke to Moses out of the bush; and Moses, who had had no fear over the unknown cause of the bush, suddenly had great fear because he was in the presence of God. The unknown reason for the bush's burning without being consumed was surely an alarm signal; but, whatever may have been the feelings of Moses, he did not then hide his face but went instead to examine the bush. Yet, when he knew who it was who spoke to him, then he hid his face and was afraid.

In both these stories we have anxiety, but the responses are opposite in the two cases. Joseph's brothers should have been terrified at the expected fate of their brother Benjamin and their father Jacob; but they were not. They may have had, in the colloquial sense, some anxiety about what would occur; but this was insufficient to drive them to work until the source of their feelings was defined. Yet when they confronted the unexpected money in the sack, then they responded to this as an alarm signal and fled.

Moses, we could say, should have been scared out of his wits at the sight of the bush burning but still standing. He could have been forgiven if he had taken one look, seen the bush as an alarm signal, and turned to run. But he

did not. Alarm signal it might be, but he would investigate whatever it was alarming him about. Yet when he knew that God spoke to him from the bush, he was afraid. He was not afraid to be afraid of the Lord.

Joseph's brothers were afraid of being afraid. Their response to the alarm signal was to ignore it when facing it might have helped them and to flee it when flight could do no good. Moses was not afraid of being afraid. He faced the alarm signal as such when exploring its cause might help. But when this source was identified as the Lord, he was not afraid to show his fear of the partly unknown God upon whom men might look and live.

These two forms of response to anxiety, illustrated in our two stories, may be called, as Rollo May calls them, "neurotic anxiety" and "normal anxiety" or "ontological anxiety." This usage is understandable and may prove useful. It emphasizes the type of response on the part of the entire person to the assault by a still unknown aggressor. Yet it may be misleading too. For it was not the anxiety as such which made the brothers flee and Moses face but the respective characters of the brothers and of Moses. The brothers have such fear of fear that they cannot explore. Moses has no fear of fear but explores until he comes upon that which is awesome, God himself.

What has all this to do with the Christian faith? How has our clearer understanding of the nature of anxiety helped us to understand the relevance of the faith to it? The New Testament lesson we have heard is the story, the illustration, given by Jesus just before his famous words, "Be not anxious" (Luke 12: 16–21). The rich man, not knowing where to keep the harvest from his crops, proposes to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. He wants to say to his soul: Relax, take it easy, now you can be secure.

The point of Jesus' story is that the way in which the rich man responds to the alarm signal that something is wrong is not the right way. He is not wrong in recognizing such a signal has been given. He responds so as to allay his anxiety, to evade it, conceal it, cover it up. No doubt he worries until the new barns get up; we can imagine his issuing strong words about the wages which craft unions demand. But he is afraid for the wrong thing, in the wrong way. He does not hear the signal aright; so what he does in consequence is all wrong. It makes no difference if he works feverishly and gets the new barns up in a day. In a sense, we might say that if he were neurotic enough to sit around baffled for a while, there could be a better chance of his discovering eventually what the alarm was about than if he is certain he knows when he does not.

From this story Jesus says, "Be not anxious about your life." If you act in effect like the rich man, you have, he adds, "little faith." Like so many things in the Gospels, this sounds increasingly strange the more squarely we

look at it. Did not the rich man have confidence: in his ability to build new barns, to find security, to take some constructive step of action instead of mooning around while his grain went to waste? How can *he* be the picture of anxiety? He is not the worried poet, wringing his hands and crying how awful is the state of the world. He is the man of action, the captain of agricultural industry. How can he symbolize at the same time anxiety and lack of faith?

The answer begins to come clear with such a rephrasing of the question. The rich man fears fear. At any time the alarm signal begins to ring, he tries to shut it off instead of to heed its message. No doubt he, being what he is, cannot do otherwise. But what would be necessary if he were to recognize the alarm as alarm, to investigate its cause as Moses did? This would be faith—being not fearful of fear. It would be very different from not being afraid, or from being afraid of nothing. It would be unashamed to be afraid of that which is genuinely fearsome. But it would not equate the as yet unknown with the genuinely fearsome, and it would not do everything possible to avoid the feeling of fear and dread.

This is of course a minimal, even a negative, definition of faith. But, so far as it goes, it seems true to the Gospel story. The rich man's lack of faith is not, then, merely a lack of faith in God; it is equally a lack of true faith in his innermost self and in his fellow human beings. Were he to face the alarm signal as such, he would have to suffer a pain which he has no confidence that he can stand—so security for him means not recognizing it as such. But his security is illusory, and his actions only cut him off the more from hearing the alarm, which goes on ringing though he have not ears to hear.

In his poem on anxiety, Mr. Auden makes clear that this is not necessarily an age in which more anxiety exists but rather one in which there is more awareness of anxiety. If the awareness of anxiety can be made like Moses, not like the rich man or like Joseph's brothers, this very fact may give us some hope. If the danger situation to ourselves and our world is serious, then fools we are if we search for soundproofed ivory towers. But if we can hear the alarm as an alarm, then we can, like Moses, search for what is behind it and makes it ring.

I realize that one may say: That's all very well for personal anxiety, relating to things and people near by, with whom some change may be in your power. But what about the larger dangers that seem so close, yet over which we seem so powerless? The sole answer to this must be: Faith cannot protect us from being afraid, and the current situation is fearsome. It can save us only from the fear of being afraid and the inevitable attempts at evasion which accompany such fear. To have faith in the face of the present situation will

not make the lump in my throat disappear. But it can prevent me from becoming panicky when that lump, for good cause, arises.

But our faith can do more than that. As with Moses, it can save us from the fear of fear as we view the burning bush. But it can also, as with Moses, make us hide our face before the vision of God. Our finitude, our sin, our potentialities unrealized, our freedom still chained—to recognize these is surely to make us fearful, and we rightly hide our face from God. But to hide our face means that we sense his vision; to sink down means that we feel ourselves supported. We face the alarm of anxiety and find ourselves afraid—but we could not fear if we did not already, in some measure, have the gift of faith.

Joseph Bond Chapel
January 2, 1951

Seward Hiltner

A NOTE TO THE ALUMNI

Since last October when I began my work with the Divinity School, I have become personally acquainted with many of the alumni. My acquaintance has grown more rapidly than I anticipated in this short time. Even so, I have met all too few of those of you who are scattered abroad in the North American continent, to say nothing of others throughout the world. The arm of the Divinity School is long, and the alumni are a school within themselves whose groves are more extensive than any one of us imagines.

Perhaps it is not surprising that the alumni have taught me some things about the Divinity School that I did not know, about students that I did not know, and a great deal about alumni that I did not know. Whatever else, the alumni of the Divinity School are rarely indifferent to it. They may be critical of its present policies, general aims, academic bent, etc. They may want to shake it to its foundations. On the other hand, they may be inclined to say, "Well done." In either case, there is a concern, and this concern is something that cannot be dispensed with beneath the Gothic towers on the South Side of Chicago. As long as you are throwing sticks and stones, or blowing trumpets, or evincing some more abstemious manifestation that the Divinity School is still at work on the Midway, we should not be discouraged. Long periods of isolation and silence on the part of our alumni should be the source of some of our uneasiness. In such cases we hope that we will first place the blame on our own doorsteps.

One of the most commonplace utterances that one hears in church councils in these days is that the church has not begun to tap its vast resources either in the talent of its constituency or in its great wealth. So much could be said, however trite it may sound by now, about schools and their alumni. There is that to be accomplished here, promisingly rich in flower and fruit, which has scarcely been seriously attempted anywhere at any time, to our knowledge. A serious and sustained effort to give the greatest possible mutual advantage to school and alumni in their relationship must be the work of both school and

alumni. Here at the Divinity School we earnestly seek to take all the initiative we can in this work.

To this end, the present personnel of the Divinity School will seek to continue to widen its acquaintance among the alumni. An attempt will be made at all times, in all contacts, to give you a realistic picture of our work, the philosophy of Christian education with which we are informed, something of our goals and hopes for the future. Wherever we meet you, both at home and abroad, we hope you will be constrained to discuss your fears and hopes concerning us. May we always meet in the perspective of the larger unity of our common ground. Our ultimate concern is one—better men and a better society—and our immediate concern is good men of religion like Chaucer's "persoun." Out of our own background, tradition, experience, comprehension, and faith, we can interpret this in no less than Christian terms, yet not without sympathy and understanding and continued discussion with those whose convictions differ.

The Divinity School is growing in numbers. We like to think that it is growing also in competence and integrity, in spiritual dynamic and reach. As one of the staff who will be giving time especially set aside for attention to alumni relations, interests, and inquiries, I hope to make many contacts this coming year with you in various sections of the country, as well as here on our campus. It is our hope that these contacts will not be simply conversational in nature but that they will result in part in concerted action in behalf of our common concerns. And I shall be glad to report to you from time to time through these pages some of these events and happenings, as well as my understanding of their significance for our mutual concerns.

WILLIAM N. WEAVER
Assistant to the Dean

NOTES FROM THE DEAN'S OFFICE

REGISTRATION

The registration in the Federated Theological Schools for the Summer Quarter is 107. Of this total number, 75 were registered in the Divinity School, 27 in the Chicago Theological Seminary, and 5 in Meadville Theological School.

CONVOCATION

At the Spring Convocation, June 15, 1951, the following degrees were conferred:

Doctor of Philosophy

WILLIAM ARMITAGE BEARDSLEE
Thesis: Man in History in the Thought of Paul

HORACE ANSON DULMAGE
Thesis: An Analysis of the Initial Data for Inquiry concerning God

EUGENE LYSNE FEVOLD
Thesis: The History of Norwegian-American Lutheranism, 1870–90

EUGENE STANLEY WEHRLI
Thesis: The New Testament Conception of Non-Christian History

Master of Arts

THOMAS JONATHAN JACKSON ALTIZER
Thesis: Nature and Grace in the Theology of Saint Augustine with Special Reference to the Confessions and the Anti-Pelagian Writings.

STANLEY ELWOOD BRUSH

Thesis: Husain, the Shiite Savior: An Analysis of the Muharram Commemoration

CLAUDE RAY DOBBINS

Thesis: Paul Tillich's Philosophy of History

FOREST WILLIAM HOWELL

Thesis: Wieman's Criticism of the Personalistic Doctrine of God

RUSSELL KAORU NAKATA, JR.

Thesis: The Christology of William Law

BERKELEY DIENDOH PUGH

Thesis: The Religion of the Khasis—a People of Northeast India

ALUMNI NEWS

MEMORIALS

Elmer W. K. Mould, Ph.D. '30, professor of biblical history and literature in Elmira College, New York, died on November 15, 1950. For nearly one-third of a century Dr. Mould served Elmira College with distinction as a highly effective teacher of Bible and religion. His influence will be perpetuated by several well-organized handbooks dealing with various areas of biblical studies. Immediately prior to his death he succeeded in accomplishing a comprehensive revision of his well-known manual entitled *The Essentials of Biblical History.*

PERSONALS

Along with other distinguished scholars, Edgar J. Goodspeed, Ph.D. '98, received from Yale University an honorary doctorate at the Two Hundred and Fiftieth Convocation on June 11.

R. R. Wright, B.D. '01, M.A. '04, was a recent visitor at the Divinity School. He is now bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal church in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Ukicki Kawaguchi, Ph.D. '14, who is a professor at the Kanto Gakuin University, Japan, where he is teaching courses on Christianity and English, is also director of the Institute of Christian Studies at the university.

Archer B. Bass, M.A. '15, has been elected to the Board of Missions and Education in Virginia. Mr. Bass retired from the active ministry in 1950.

Frank H. Swanson, M.A. '18, is teaching foreign languages in Linda Vista Baptist Bible College and Seminary. He recently received the Doctor of Theology degree from that institution.

R. E. E. Harkness, Ph.D. '27, who is professor emeritus in church history at Crozier Theological Seminary, will be teaching in the summer school at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, during the coming season.

Ralph Ernest Bayes, ex-'29, who has been the minister of Mariner's House in Boston since 1931, is now serving as ad interim minister of Pilgrim Congregational Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

J. Minton Batten, Ph.D. '30, who is professor of church history in the Vanderbilt School of Religion, has recently published a book, *Protestant Background in History.*

Kenneth W. Clark, Ph.D. '31, is spending the early part of this summer in Greece, where he will participate in extensive celebrations of the nineteen-hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the Apostle Paul in Greece. The remainder

of the summer Dr. Clark will spend in scholarly conferences on the Continent and in England.

Oliver K. Black, ex-'32, received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from the Chicago Theological Seminary in 1951. Mr. Black was elected chairman of the Commission on Missions at the Illinois conference of Congregational Christian churches.

Charles Scribner's Sons report that the American translation of Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament* has gone to press and will be available for purchase in the autumn. The translator is Kendrick Grobel, M.A. '32, now professor of New Testament in the School of Religion at Vanderbilt University.

Benjamin E. Mays, Ph.D. '35, president of Morehouse College and Divinity Alumnus for the year 1949, has been elected to the significant group of Phi Beta Kappa Associates. Membership in this group is limited to two hundred persons only.

J. Allen Cabaniss, Ph.D. '39, is now professor of history at the University of Mississippi.

On June 12, Arnold Crompton, M.A. '39, was elected president of the board of trustees of the Starr King School for the Ministry in Berkeley, California. Mr. Crompton will continue with his pastoral duties in Oakland, California.

At the recent annual Baptist Convention held in Buffalo, New York, Sidney Mead, Ph.D. '40, was re-elected secretary of the Divinity School Alumni Association for the year 1951–52.

On May 8 the Right Reverend Noble C. Powell, bishop of Maryland, ordained John H. Blackidge, B.D. '43, to the order of deacons in the Protestant Episcopal church of America. The ordination service was held in St. Paul's Church, Baltimore.

Reverend Robert E. Wiltenburg, ex-'45, is pastor of Saint Paul's Lutheran Church in Cullman, Alabama. His congregation is now engaged in building a two hundred thousand dollar twenty-one classroom school. This school, when completed, will be the first white Protestant parochial school in the state of Alabama.

James Harrel Cobb, ex-'46, has just been appointed to an interim professorship in New Testament in the School of Religion of Vanderbilt University for the academic year 1951–52. There he takes the place of Kendrick Grobel, M.A. '32, who will be temporarily absent from Vanderbilt on a Fulbright Fellowship. Regularly Mr. Cobb is professor of history and philosophy of religion in the University of Toledo.

At the annual Baptist Convention held in Buffalo, New York, Carl Stromee, Ph.D. '47, who is pastor of the First Baptist Church in Wilmette, was elected president of the Divinity School Alumni Association for the year 1951–52.

Since March 1, 1951, David E. Witheridge, M.A. '48, has been the executive secretary of the Minneapolis Church Federation.

[PRINTED IN U.S.A.]